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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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TALKING TURKEY

The main thing about your Christmas turkey is that it should be tender, brown and well-stuffed. It matters little whether the breed was a Bronze, White Holland, Bourbon Red, Black Norfolk, Narragansett, or Slate. The proof of a bird is in the eating. However, your turkey holds more than gastronomic interest, according to ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum. Young as it may be, its history stems back several centuries.

Indians of the American Southwest first domesticated the turkey, a species found native only on this continent. Spanish explorers took Mexican breeding stock to Spain from whence it spread to other countries of the Old World. It reached England between 1520 and 1540. It was brought back to America by the early settlers. In the course of time the several varieties mentioned above were developed by breeding. Apparently all originated from Mexican stock. The wild race which was once plentiful in eastern North America seems to have contributed nothing to your Christmas dinner, although your pioneer forefathers feasted on it. Wild turkeys which once roamed the woods of Southern Ontario are preserved as specimens in the Royal Ontario Museum.

DO YOU KNOW that Arctic reindeer, mammals which have become symbols of Christmas, once roamed through southern Canada? This was during the Ice Age when the glaciers covered Ontario. They existed with the mastodon, woolly mammoth, and musk-ox, along the bleak, barren borders of the great ice sheet. Specimens are preserved in the Royal Ontario Museum.

TURQUOISE FOR DECEMBER

December's icy streets should hold no perils if you wear turquoise jewellery, according to ancient beliefs. This stone was thought to protect the wearer from injury through falls of all kinds. Even today in some parts of the world it is considered sacred. It is sometimes used to symbolize prosperity.

On inquiry at the Royal Ontario Museum we found that it is an opaque stone, depending for beauty on its blue or green colour. Unfortunately it is somewhat porous and is, therefore, susceptible to moisture or grease. The colour may fade or change, often turning from blue to green. The sky-blue variety is considered the most valuable, and attempts are often made to restore this shade by means of various treatments.

Turquoise comes chiefly from Persia, Egypt, and various localities in the United States. It has not been found in Canada.

ORNITHOLOGIST HONOURED

Mr. T. M. Shortt, Artist-Associate of the Division of Birds, Royal Ontario Museum, was elected a member of the American Ornithologists' Union at its recent meeting in New York City. Mr. Shortt has been on the staff of the Museum since 1930. He is the author of many ornithological papers and has made field studies in Ontario, in the Canadian West, in Alaska, and in the Eastern Arctic.

NEW YEAR FORMULA

BREAK ALL THE DISHES, PUT OUT THE FIRE.

So you think you will turn over a new leaf and start all over again with a New Year resolution. If you want a model for a complete and thorough job of it, do as the Aztecs did. According to Mr. K. E. Kidd of the Royal Ontario Museum, these ancient Mexicans regarded the occasion seriously. Their "New Year," which recurred every fifty-two years, was a time of danger and grave portent. The world in fact would certainly come to an end unless the gods were lenient. They prepared for the occasion by smashing their images, breaking their pottery and by extinguishing the fires throughout the nation. On the fateful evening, vast multitudes assembled in the square before the Great Temple in Mexico City. Here priests offered appropriate prayers and sacrifices. At midnight, one whose duty it was began with his drill to make new fire on the great altar. At the first sign of flame a sigh of relief went up from the crowd, for they knew that the world would continue. Runners lighted torches at the fire and soon the whole nation was ablaze with promise. They made new idols and new pottery and new life was really begun. Examples of Aztec images and pottery, like those destroyed at their rituals, are contained in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.

VOLCANOES ARE NATURE'S LAND MINES

"Although man has contrived some very destructive land mines and bombs, nature still holds first place for great explosions," says Dr. E. S. Moore of the Royal Ontario Museum. "The volcano that recently opened up among farms and villages in Mexico is a good reminder," continued the geologist. "So powerful are some volcanic explosions that craters miles in diameter and over a thousand feet deep have been made in the earth's surface. Stones, tons in weight, have been hurled many miles and debris has buried cities like Pompeii in a few hours."

"What about the possibility of such super-mines in Canada?" we ask.

"Hundreds of them existed in past ages and the remnants of the debris hurled from volcanoes may still be seen in many places," said Dr. Moore, "but the old conical mountains have almost all been removed by the tooth of time. Volcanoes occur in areas where the earth's crust is under specially severe strain. Fortunately, most of Canada has settled down to a stable existence."

"Geologically or politically?" we question.

"Both," concluded Dr. Moore. "For a long time it has been necessary to go to foreign countries to see a geological or a political revolution."

MUSEUM HOURS

When in Toronto you will find the Museum open free from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and on Sundays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. As a war measure it is closed on Mondays. There is a 15c. admission charge on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.